

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS
RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND SCIENCE EDUCATION
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Assessment of the National Science Board's Action Plan for STEM Education

October 10, 2007

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Today's hearing will explore the recommendations of the National Science Board's recently-released report, "A National Action Plan for Addressing the Critical Needs of the U.S. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education System." I understand that the report had its genesis as the Board was preparing the 2006 Science and Technology Indicators. The statistics on the state of science and engineering spurred the Board to create a Commission to further explore the startling data on U.S. science and engineering education. I applaud the effort, which has resulted in the report before us.

The report has highlighted two grand challenges: coordination of STEM education efforts and improving teacher preparation. As the Academic Competitive Council report revealed, there are many federal STEM education efforts, but they suffer from a lack of both evaluation and coordination. Improving coordination is challenging, even just within the federal government, because each individual program has its merits. Expanding coordination of STEM education efforts to all levels is an incredible task that requires a "Sputnik-like" moment to unite everyone around a common goal. Several public opinion reports have recently highlighted data showing that parents are not convinced that their kids must be skilled in math and science to survive in today's economy. Until we have that buy-in at the grassroots level, it will be hard for attempts at coordination to be sustained and successful.

I am pleased to see that the Board has also recommended the establishment of national content guidelines, and heartened that the Washington Post recently reported that superintendents for Fairfax County (VA) and Montgomery County (MD) believe that in order to properly assess student achievement, national content standards are needed. I have strongly supported national voluntary guidelines to help ensure that our mobile population receives a quality education, even if they change schools several times during their K-12 education. Consequently, I have introduced H.R. 325, the SPEAK Act, which would provide incentives for states to adopt voluntary standards in math and science. I know that this idea is controversial and look forward to learning from our witnesses about their views on this issue.

I trust this hearing will help Congress learn about the best ways we can advance the recommendations presented in the Board's report and I thank our witnesses for being here today.